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22 ^{May} 1952

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MEMORANDUM FOR: Research Advisory Committee, Assessment & Evaluation Staff

FROM:

SUBJECT: Proposed research program in the area of assessment

This memorandum proposing research activities in the assessment field is based upon the recommendations of a number of psychologists on our staff. During the past several weeks the undersigned has engaged in conferences and informal discussions which have included most of the psychologists in the organization. While not all of those will agree with all of the points mentioned below, it is believed that the following program represents in principle the thinking of a majority of the staff. This memorandum is concerned solely with recommendations for research in assessment activities. Similar recommendations for research in connection with training evaluation will be prepared shortly. Still another memorandum will be devoted primarily to research activities in the special area of validation. Since the several areas overlap to a considerable degree, many of the proposals and recommendations in this memorandum are oriented toward our common research needs rather than toward the research needs of assessment alone.

1. Research in the general objectives and potentialities of assessment.

There seems to be general agreement among members of the assessment staff that there is urgent necessity for a thorough study of the assessment procedures, including an analysis of its fundamental objectives, a survey of the existing and potential tools and techniques, and the establishing of

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systematic ways of improving assessment. Apparently there is no clearly formulated "philosophy of assessment," no set of principles or policies which are generally subscribed to on the part of the psychologists engaged in assessment, and no common goal or set of goals toward which all are working. It is proposed that we begin a systematic research program aimed at (1) studying the jobs for which we are attempting to appraise people, (2) deciding, on the basis of the best psychological judgment we can muster, and the best advice we can get from persons with intelligence experience, which psychological traits seem to be required in each of the several jobs with which we are concerned and the relative importance of each such trait in each job, (3) studying the tests and other appraisal devices at our disposal to determine where we can find the best measures of the traits on our lists, (4) setting up a systematic assessment procedure resulting in ratings of some sort for each individual on each of the traits, and (5) devising a method of recording and reporting assessment results which will ensure their best use. (N.B.: Some of the above points are very similar to the O.S.S.'s program, and a number of our staff members have suggested that we might take as our starting point their trait listings, modified where necessary in the light of our experience, and set up a systematic procedure resembling theirs for arriving at trait ratings from test scores and other observational data. This suggestion is believed to be worthy of further study.) It is recommended, therefore, that the assessment psychologists, perhaps in collaboration with psychologists from Training Evaluation (who have closely related problems), undertake a research project aimed at clarifying and systematizing the assessment procedures along lines similar to those suggested above. Such a program will require a great deal of work and will, of course, make inroads upon the time which assessment personnel could otherwise spend in conducting assessments. It is felt, however, that the need for such

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a research project is so great that it should be given first priority among the activities of the Assessment Branch.

2. Research on improving specific assessment techniques.

A great need exists for research directed toward sharpening the tools used in assessment. Much more needs to be done, particularly in the fields of constructing and standardizing rating methods for situational tests, the study of test reliabilities, analysis of the reliabilities of observers in group situations, etc. As validation activities progress and as criterion studies begin to produce results, needs for new tests and observational techniques will be indicated to be selected either from tests in existence or constructed by the staff. It is recommended that research of this kind be made the responsibility of the Research and Validation Branch, assisted when possible by other staff members whose major interests lie in the specific fields concerned.

3. The utilization of validation findings.

The assessment program will need continual review and revision as information is gathered concerning the performance, in training or in the field, of assessed individuals. Reports on success or failure, analysis of criterion information and work conditions, conferences with operational officials, study of de-briefings, perhaps even trips into the field--these and other validation sources should yield data to be fed back into the assessment procedures. It is proposed that validation activities as such be carried out by members of the Research and Validation

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Branch, but that regular channels be set up to enable validation findings to be transmitted to the Assessment Branch so that assessment procedures may be readily and promptly modified accordingly.

4. The "sampling" problem in assessment

A problem which is associated with research in the assessment field but which will be discussed more fully in the forthcoming memorandum on recommended research in validation, is the problem of the selection of individuals to be assessed. At present we have no means of controlling the flow of individuals into assessment, and no way of finding out how the individuals who are assessed compare with those who are not, or with Agency personnel already in service in the several jobs with which we are concerned. This situation makes it difficult to conduct research toward the improvement of assessment and makes validation research even more difficult. It is strongly recommended that a procedure be set up which will enable us to assess a fairly large representative group of people under consideration in each of the several position classifications, preferably by routinely assessing all applicants in certain pre-determined categories (which we are not now prepared to do) or by assessing a randomly selected sample of such individuals. Only thus can we construct the kind of "yardsticks" we need for judging and comparing people. Our test norms, for example, and our ideas of what constitutes satisfactory performance in group situations may be seriously biased in directions of which we are unaware because of the fact that we do not know how representative our samples are with respect to unselected groups.

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5. Some general recommendations concerning research.

The following recommendations do not bear specifically upon the program of research in assessment, but they are listed here because they are regarded as necessary to the successful implementation of research in all the areas of our work.

a. Liaison and staff training. A successful research program cannot be conducted in a scientific vacuum. There are many research studies in progress at universities, in other Government agencies, and in industrial organizations, which are concerned with problems similar to ours. In many cases these projects have the benefit of larger staffs, more generous budgets, and broader research facilities than are available at present to us. A few examples of these are the Laboratory of Personality Assessment and Group Behavior at the University of Illinois, the Air Forces' Human Relations Research Institute (which is conducting psychological research in the areas of strategic intelligence and in psychological warfare), the Mutual Security Agency (which is reported to be conducting research on the personal and social characteristics important in the selection of Americans for assignment to foreign posts where efficient and congenial relationships with indigenous people is a critical problem), the assessment program at the Minneapolis-Honeywell Corporation, the University of Michigan's Group Dynamics Institute, and many others. We urgently need a systematic procedure which will accomplish the following: (1) identify those research programs which appear to be most valuable to us, and (2) establish communication with them so that we can be informed of their findings (through correspondence, visits to their laboratories, or invitations for conferences with us here in Washington). In the case of Government agencies engaged in research in

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which we might be interested, we should take immediate steps through the appropriate liaison channels to be placed on the distribution lists of their research reports. (3) Review, evaluate, and abstract the research findings of organizations working in fields related to ours, and disseminate the important conclusions to our own staff--at staff training sessions, planning meetings, in staff bulletins, or by whatever means are most convenient. The recommendations listed above apply with equal force to information in the professional literature--books and journals--and to the reports and discussions at scientific meetings and conventions. Since none of us can afford the time (or the expense) to read and digest thoroughly all the published material related to psychological matters, we should arrange among our staff members for a complete coverage of such sources of information. Individuals should be assigned the task of reviewing certain publications--preferably those most closely related to their individual fields of interest and competence--and reporting regularly upon such of their contents as seem most nearly relevant to our objectives. (This, of course, should be considered as part of each individual's regular duties.) Similarly, every convention and conference of scientists in fields related to our problems should be covered by one or more staff members, and a report circulated in a staff bulletin, at staff meetings, or by other means. (This procedure, of course, is routine in many other agencies.) These recommendations concerning the activities of other research organizations, published material, and the proceedings of scientific meetings, are related to the very elementary intelligence principle that one should explore "overt" sources of information before one sets out on his own to discover, perhaps at great expense of time and energy, what could have been obtained merely for the asking, if one only knew where to ask.

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b. Personnel. It is obvious that a program such as that envisioned here, or even a sizeable part of it, will require the services of a much larger number of people than are currently assigned to the Research and Validation Branch. The participation, in a systematic way, of the psychologists on the assessment staff and the training evaluation staff is also necessary to implement the program. The following recommendations are therefore made: (1) The assessment schedule should be altered to enable the staff to devote a part of their time regularly to research problems. (2) The research and validation staff should be increased to its authorized strength. It is anticipated that additional personnel will be needed, over and above those now authorized, especially since the research program of the Training Evaluation Branch (not described in this memorandum) will require a large number of man-hours. (3) A point which cannot be too strongly emphasized is that psychologists assigned to Research and Validation be carefully selected with respect to competence in measurement techniques and validation procedures. It is felt that the selection of such personnel is a problem which deserves the serious consideration of the Research Committee. Especially, the chief of the branch should be carefully chosen and should if possible be someone with national recognition in the validation field. This person should be one whose competence and personality will command the respect and cooperation of our own staff and the staffs of the operating offices with whom he will have to work, and he should be given considerable latitude so far as the organization, personnel, procedures, etc., of the Research and Validation Branch are concerned. This key position should be filled soon. It is tentatively suggested that an individual considered for this position possess the following qualifications: (1) the status

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of Associate (preferable Fellow) in the Division on Evaluation and Measurement of the American Psychological Association, (2) a record of significant scientific contributions to the fields of measurement, validation, or prediction, (3) experience, preferably of several years' duration, in the active supervision of research in the field of validation, (4) familiarity with modern principles of research methodology, and (5) contacts with important individuals and organizations engaged in research related to our own needs and objectives. It is estimated that there are perhaps 20 to 30 such individuals in the United States today, and it should be possible to recruit such a person provided he is given sufficient authority to undertake the program discussed above (or one of similar scope) and guarantees of the necessary administrative support to implement it. Without such assurances, it is doubtful that the position will be attractive to the kind of person we need.